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A

PLAIN AND POPULAR

VIEW

OF SOME OF THE

LEADING EVIDENCES

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

By T. TOLLER.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following discourse was delivered some time since, to the Author's own congregation, without any idea of publication. It is now sent into the world solely with a view to the benefit of young persons, and the lower classes of people, who may want time or inclination to read large and learned productions, but who may be in danger of infection from the prevailing infidelity of the age. Should any such be preserved, by the blessing of God on its perusal, from the baneful tendencies of a

[vi]

sceptical spirit, the Author's best feelings
will be gratified, and his end in it's pub-
lication abundantly answered.

Kettering,
April, 1797.

I TIM. i. 15.

*This is a FAITHFUL SAYING, and worthy of all
acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the
world to save sinners.*

TO a rational and sinful being, who seriously reflects, and understands his own case, there cannot be a more interesting inquiry than—"is this fact?" The Apostle says it is a *faithful saying*, or a true report: What reason have we to believe that he says true?—We have reason

FIRST, from the *credibility* of the history in which this great doctrine is to be found.

How came you and I to know any thing about Jesus Christ? that there ever was such a person, or that he came hither for any such purpose as saving sinners? Why, it may be said, "we have a particular account of him in the Bible: for instance, we have a large history of him written by four different men, viz. *Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.*" Granted: none can deny that the doctrine of the text is that of those men called Evangelists. But we know that there are such books as *Gulliver's Travels*; the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*; *Robinson Crusoe*, &c.

which speak of very wonderful persons and very marvellous events, but nobody believes there ever were such persons or such transactions. How do we know that this is not the case with the whole New Testament history ?

Observe the difference. Such writers as those just mentioned evidently and professedly wrote for their own and the amusement of others, and never pretended to make people believe what they relate as facts ; or if they had, none of the thinking and serious part of mankind could ever have been deceived by them, so as to believe a word of what they wrote. But these four men, the Evangelists, gravely and solemnly state all they say about Jesus Christ as certain solid facts, which came within their own knowledge. *That which we have seen and heard, say they, declare we unto you.*

Again ; the writers of the romances referred to, relate a number of marvellous things indeed, but things of no real, or at least general, consequence. A thinking man would not much care whether they were true or not, and therefore would not inquire into their evidence. But the principal facts which the Evangelists relate, were of the deepest possible consequence, which involved their own, and the eternal welfare of their fellow-creatures. *These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing ye might have life through his name.* Now whenever they published facts of such importance,
sensible

sensible and serious men would feel themselves greatly interested, and make anxious enquiries into the truth of these things. Suppose we heard a credible report that a large gold mine was discovered in a distant part of the kingdom, and that all the wealth of it was to be appropriated to the relief of the poor in this town; would it not make people very earnestly inquire whether there were any real ground for such a report?

But it may be said “the very gravity and positivity with which these men assert the great things alluded to, might deceive even sensible and serious persons, who might impose upon themselves by the magnitude and value of the things asserted.” But you will observe, that the history of Christ by the Evangelists was written in the very country, and near the time, where and when Christ is said to have lived, and all that he did is said to have been transacted, so that if the whole were a lie, hundreds and thousands of persons in the towns and cities which they mention by name, could have arisen as one man and contradicted every thing.—Suppose three or four men in and about London were to publish their different accounts of a person who lived there ten or twelve years ago, who went into the different hospitals and cured all the patients there without speaking a word; called dead bodies out of their coffins and graves; fed ten thousand people in Moorfields with five or six loaves of bread, and was at last pub-

lickly executed by order of government, but rose again, and was seen by many persons afterwards for forty days together;—suppose such a publication to appear, would not the whole city and it's neighbourhood be ready to contradict it? could one soul there, or one man of sense through the kingdom, be brought to believe it? And yet the Evangelists were believed by many thousands of persons, and that at a time when many thousands more would have been glad if they could, to contradict all they said.

But it may be further asked—"How do we know that Christ's history was written about that time, and in that country? perhaps some designing men forged and published it somewhere at a distance, and three or four hundred years after the events are said to have taken place; and in consequence of this distance, both of time and place, no body could contradict them; it might be all true for any thing that any person *there* and *then* could say."—But though nobody could contradict them, how could they get any body to *believe* them? A thousand tongues would say, "You bring forward a very wonderful story, and you tell us the whole happened so many hundred years ago, and so far off: How came *you* to know all this? There is not a word about it in any other history; how came you to be the first that received the information, especially when, as you say, all mankind are equally interested in it? It can be nothing but a dream,

or an invention of your own." Suppose a person were to publish a book asserting, contrary to all the histories of England extant, that there was a *Henry the Ninth*, who sat upon the British throne; that he was the greatest and best prince that ever reigned; and made all the good laws we have; that he was murdered by his wicked subjects, and by and by came out of his grave again.—Though these facts were said to have happened so many years ago that no one living could contradict such a writer from his own personal knowledge, yet who would believe him?"—"How came you to be the first to know all this, when no other history says any thing about it?" The more positive a man was in such a case, the more fit we should think him for Bedlam, and the less disposed would any mortal be to give him credit.

Now think, how is it possible to account for it, that such multitudes should be brought to believe the gospel history, such numbers of large christian churches planted in different countries, and so much sacrificed for the sake of christianity, upon the bare word of a few mad men or cheats, who forged an history about somebody that lived many hundred miles off, and as many hundred years ago, that no other history says any thing about, and nobody else knows any thing of?

"But how do we know that there were such men as *Matthew, Mark, Luke* and *John*, and that they actually wrote their respective

Gospels?" Is there any man here, or in the kingdom, who doubts whether there were such a person as *Milton*, and whether he wrote the *Paradise Lost*? as *Shakespear*, and whether he wrote the Plays ascribed to him? or *Rollin*, and whether he wrote the Ancient History? or *Calvin*, and whether he wrote the *Institutes*? They lived many years ago, and some of them were foreigners, and yet nobody has any doubt on this head, because they were known, public characters, wrote in the face of open day, owned their writings, which every body ascribed to them, and no one else pretended to be the author of them. The same things may be said of the four Evangelists. They were personally known by thousands; they acknowledged their writings; nobody else pretended to them, and they were universally owned as theirs. So that the foundation of our hope lies in an history which bears all the genuine marks of credibility.

SECONDLY. We have authority for the assertion in the text arising from the NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE which the Gospel history contains.

It is often said that one of the strongest kinds of proof is that which rests not on any one hinge of evidence, but where a number of strong pointed circumstances hang together, and unite in different ways to maintain the same fact. For instance:—Suppose it was reported that St. Paul's cathedral was struck with lightning. If any one of you, of whose
veracity

veracity I had a good opinion, was just come from London and told me it was certainly true, for you saw it done, I should readily believe it; but if I read the same account in three or four newspapers; if I recollected that that very night was very stormy here; if I went to town, and passing by different groups of people heard them talking of it; and if I afterwards actually saw the cracks in the walls and dome which the lightning was said to have made; in this case I should believe the fact much more fully than upon your bare word. Indeed I should not have a doubt remaining upon the case; though all these circumstances by no means amount to *demonstrative proof*.

Now apply this. We find in an history, *externally* credible, that a person named Jesus Christ called himself the Saviour of Sinners; and when we think of the excellency and unblameableness of his character, as recorded there, we have reason to believe that such a person would not tell a falsehood. But we do not rest our faith on his bare word; for we find that this person was circumstantially described in books (perpetually cited by the Evangelists) which appeared many ages before he was born. We find him there declared to be *a light that should lighten the Gentiles, and God's salvation to the ends of the earth. As one that should give liberty to the captive, and preach glad-tidings to the meek. That he should be cut off, but not for himself; be*
wounded

wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; and that he should not see corruption. At the same time we find his name, titles, offices, works; the tribe to which he should belong, the family whence he should descend, and the time and place of his birth minutely specified. Now the antiquity and authenticity of these writings we have not merely his word for, but the full testimony of his bitterest enemies, the Jews, who are inflexible vouchers for these writings as *prophecies*. As to their exclusive applicableness to him, we will judge for ourselves; we want not *their* opinion.

Again; we find, upon farther examination, that Christ not only said he was the Saviour of sinners, but, to give weight to what he affirmed, he performed the most astonishing wonders; controuled all nature, commanded away diseases; created food for multitudes; ordered individuals back from the invisible world, and all this in the presence of great numbers of persons. Moreover we are told, that, being put to death, he actually arose from the grave at the exact time he had previously appointed. Besides this, that he enabled other persons to work miracles as wonderful as his own. And all was done with this exprefs declared view, to prove that *Jesus is the Christ*. *Faith in his name*, says Peter, *hath made this man whole*. All is done *in the name of the Lord Jesus*, to prove that he is *exalted to be a prince and a saviour, giving repentance to Israel and remission*

remission of sins. So that we find that different men, who lived and delivered prophecies in different places and ages, and all many hundred years before his birth, unite their testimony with that which arises from the miracles which Christ himself wrought, and this again with that which arises from the miracles which his Apostles wrought after his death, to establish this fact, that *it is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.* If Christ had been an impostor, how was he to have bribed so many prophets to lay the plan of the cheat so many ages before he was born? How was he to have assumed a divine power to have assisted him in establishing the cheat during his life time? And how was he to hire persons, at the hazard of every thing dear to them, to keep it up after his death? to speak all manner of languages, and perform all manner of wonders, in order to effect their purpose? Surely, then, the fact asserted in my text is most highly credible.

THIRDLY. The credibility of it farther appears from it's CONSISTENCY with the DIVINE PERFECTIONS and GOVERNMENT.

Suppose it was asserted, that such a man as Dr. Doddridge had established a seminary, and supported it several years, for educating young men for all the tricks of knavery, and instructing them in the arts of thieves and pick-pockets; and that it is owing to that institution that so many persons of this description swarm about the Metropolis. If an
hundred

hundred people asserted this, or I saw it related in twenty publications, I should not believe a word of it. If indeed I found such a thing ascribed to *B. Moore Carew*, or *Jonathan Wild*, I might admit the probability of the fact. But I could not believe it of HIM, because it is utterly inconsistent with his known established excellency of character. Were it asserted that he established a seminary for educating young persons for the ministry, I might readily credit it, though I were a stranger to the fact, because it is so suitable to his known temper and principles.

Now apply this. Had the Evangelists told us that Christ came into the world divinely commissioned to save men *in* their sins, and make them happy in all manner of wickedness; had they said that he came to preach all sorts of immorality on purpose to make men wicked, and then damn and destroy them, we ought to have believed the whole an enormous, diabolical falshood, because it is impossible that such a scheme or such a messenger could have come from a righteous and gracious God. Such a system would have been flatly contradictory to the very essence of the divine perfections, and therefore could not be from God. But when we look into the Gospel, and find that all this evidence supports, all these prophecies point at, all these miracles center in, a Saviour from guilt, and vice, and misery; a redemption from all wretchedness and wickedness; that this great person was
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to give himself for us in order to procure the grand blessing of eternal life ; and yet in such a way as to exhibit the evil and danger of sin, and the rectitude of the divine administration —this is so suitable to and consistent with the blessed perfections of God, on the one hand, as the Lord God merciful and gracious, the father of his creatures though fallen, their compassionate friend though guilty ; and on the other hand, as a righteous Governor, who honours his law, and will discountenance vice wherever it is found ; this is all so clearly consistent with infinite excellence, and in all respects so worthy of God, that hence arises an additional evidence of the truth of an history in which such a system stands recorded, and the reality of a Saviour's claims who bears such a character.

FOURTHLY. The EFFECT which the publication of this fact has produced among men will authenticate it's reality.

Those of you who have read the life of *Mahomet*, must have observed to what it is to be ascribed that he made so many converts to his cause, and spread his religion so widely among mankind, viz. that he employed the two most powerful human engines in the accomplishment of his purpose, FORCE and ALLUREMENT. He stirred up a military spirit among his followers, and taught and spread his religion through the nations by the agency of fire and sword. The blessings also which he promised to his disciples were the most

most sensual and licentious that can be conceived : gratifications to which the inhabitants of those countries were particularly addicted. But how is it to be accounted for that Christianity, which had no apparent weapon with which to fight its way, but the doctrine of *THE CROSS, of Christ Jesus the Saviour of Sinners* should have such an effect as we know it had?—that multitudes were brought to believe it even at Jerusalem, where Christ was executed, and where his worst enemies lived?—that some of his most savage persecutors should come over to his cause?—that churches should be established all over Judea, and reach through a considerable part of the gentile world even before the destruction of Jerusalem? and this though opposed almost in every place by the general mass of the common people, and by every description of great men, statesmen, philosophers and magistrates? How is it to be accounted for that this simple doctrine, so entirely contrary to the pride and lusts of men, should lead thousands of thousands to forsake their idols and ancient rites and ceremonies?—that the most abandoned characters should subdue the vilest passions, forsake the most abominable practices, and become sober, just, devout, temperate and tender-hearted?—How was it that *dead Ephesians* should be *quickened* to a new moral and spiritual life, and profligate *Corinthians* become *washed* and *sanctified*? How is it to be accounted for that myriads of persons in the first and

and succeeding ages should sacrifice their dearest earthly comforts, leave their friends and homes, and worldly all; submit to the most excruciating tortures, and suffer death in the most hideous forms, for the sake of this simple truth, that *Christ came into the world to save sinners*; even taking JOYFULLY the spoiling of their goods, and rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for such a name? How is all this to be accounted for? —Why in no way, and upon no principle on earth, but that *this saying was FAITHFUL*: that it was of God; borne on and borne up in it's operation on mankind by an almighty irresistible hand, and could no more be stopt in it's progress, by human opposition, than the sun in his course by the rise of a mist, or the ebbs and flows of the sea by the resistance of the weeds which grow in the sand.

To conclude:—Let us bless God that the evidence of Christianity comes down to us in so familiar a form. If the truth of the Gospel depended upon any abstruse speculation like some difficult question in arithmetic, or some deep principle in philosophy, not one in an hundred could give a reason of the hope that is in him. But a person of the plainest understanding is capable of reading an history, and of understanding why he believes it. Now God has so ordered things that our eternal hope should lie in the familiar form of an historical narrative, so that we can read it just the same as any other history, and judge of
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it's authenticity on the same kind of ground as that of an history of England, of America, or of the French Revolution. And it is our unspeakable mercy, that allowing for the antiquity of the gospel narration, no history extant comes down to us supported by a body of evidence more, if equally, full, satisfactory and incontestible.

Again:—Reflect with satisfaction, that the objections which unbelievers generally raise, carry but little direct and positive force against the strong pillars of evangelical fact. Suppose you saw a man narrowly inspecting a magnificent palace, and heard him object to the minute flaws in the surface of the walls, as proofs that it could not be the work of the celebrated architect to whom it was ascribed, would you not condemn his folly, in confining his attention to such trifles, and overlooking the grandeur of the whole building, and the symmetry of it's several parts? What reader of common-sense would question the authenticity of a work ascribed to the celebrated Newton, on account of a few typographical errors which he might happen to discover? Objections of this sort would expose a pretended critic to universal contempt. Now it is a satisfaction to the believer in divine revelation to reflect, that most of the objections of infidels against christianity are of this kind, founded on seeming inaccuracies of expression, or trivial variations in the narratives of the different writers, or other minute circumstances,

stances, which do not in the least affect the credibility either of the grand facts or doctrines of the Bible, and which may easily be accounted for from the antiquity of the books, the oversights of transcribers, and other obvious causes. Say to such objectors,—Why cavil at difficulties so trifling, which a reasonable man might expect in books so ancient, so often transcribed, and so complicated? Look at the great whole of Gospel proof; attend to the strong chain of evidence formed by simplicity and credibility of narration—excellency of character—sublimity of object—arguments from prophecy and miracles—importance and extent of moral effect.—If you do any thing, attack the *direct* and *radical* evidence of Christian faith. Do not meanly skulk behind the veil of sly insinuation and half-disguised hints, nor expect to demolish the massy foundations of mortal hope by the mere broadness of your laugh, or the malignancy of your sneer. Come forwards with the calmness and intrepidity of a man, and urge us by serious reasoning and clear demonstrative argument to burn our Bibles, to discard the Man of Nazareth, and to retreat with you into the rich well-furnished regions of scepticism, uncertainty and death. No—you dare not undertake the arduous task. In vain have christian apologists in every age thrown out the challenge; and because you cannot effect what you would, you will at least attempt what you can, though at the best it is an effort to cleave
a rock

a rock with a straw, or drown the roar of a thunder-storm by the explosion of squibs.

I can scarcely satisfy myself to draw to a close without remarking that, after all, the most valuable proof of evangelical truth arises from personal experience of it's happy effects.

Though there be great satisfaction in dwelling on external and historical evidence, though it be highly interesting to the thoughtful enquirer, and highly instructive to the young and opening mind, yet after all, the best proof that the Gospel is of divine original, arises from a personal experience of it's moral influence, *pulling down the strong holds of sin, and reducing the thoughts to the obedience of Christ.* If I find that it has actually turned me *from darkness to light*, if it has effectually taught me to *deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and righteously and godly in the world, looking for the blessed hope, &c.* in this case, though I may not be able to argue for it, I can live upon it and die for it's sake. Without this, though I reason ever so well, and prove it ever so clearly, yet this will be my condemnation that light is come into the world, but I have loved darkness rather than light, because my deeds were evil.